

National Policy Films (*kokusaku eiga*) and Their Audiences

New Developments in Research on Wartime Japanese Cinema

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The term “national policy film” (*kokusaku eiga*) has found its way into reference works on Japanese cinema and monographs on the history of the Shōwa period.¹ While its prewar origins and meanings are rarely discussed, the expression is used to signify a body of works that – setting aside a limited number of earlier examples – were produced during the period between the outbreak of open military conflict with China in July 1937 and unconditional surrender in August 1945.² According to common judgment, this group of films continuously increased during the war years and finally – after the

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- 1 For the use of the term in standard reference works on the history of Japanese film, cf. TANAKA Jun'ichirō 田中純一郎: *Nihon eiga hattatsu shi* 日本映画発達史 (History of the Development of Japanese Film), 5 vols., Chûô Kōron Sha 1980 (1957–68); IMAMURA Shōhei 今村昌平 et al. (eds.): *Kōza Nihon eiga* 講座日本映画 (Handbook of Japanese Film), 9 vols., Iwanami Shoten 1985–8; SATÔ Tadao 佐藤忠男: *Nihon eiga shi* 日本映画史 (History of Japanese Film), 4 vols., Iwanami Shoten 1995. In English language, cf. Joseph L. ANDERSON and Donald RICHIE: *The Japanese Film. Art and Industry*. Expanded Edition, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1982 (1959); Arthur NOLLETTI & David DESSER (ed.): *Reframing Japanese Cinema. Authorship, Genre, History*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1992. For reference works on the history of world cinema that incorporate relevant passages, cf. Ephraim KATZ: *The Film Encyclopedia*, New York: Perigee Books 1979; Kristin THOMPSON and David BORDWELL: *Film History. An Introduction*, New York et al.: MacGraw-Hill 1994; Geoffrey NOWELL-SMITH (ed.): *Oxford History of World Cinema*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996. A publication on the history of Japan in the Shōwa period that includes a contribution on the subject, is: John W. DOWER: *Japan in War and Peace. Selected Essays*, New York: New Press 1993. Cf. “Japanese Cinema Goes to War”, *ibid.*: 33–54.
 - 2 As an early example frequently serves “Japan in a Time of Crisis” (*Hijōji Nippon*), a 1933 production by the Osaka Mainichi newspaper that was narrated by the acting Minister of the Army, General Araki Sadao 荒木貞夫.

adoption of the film law in 1939 and the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 – represented the larger share of contemporary cinema programs.³

The research activities that this aspect of Japanese cultural history attracted well into the 1990s were comparatively moderate and characterized by clear thematic foci. They were concerned with the general legal and administrative framework that sought to bring about the production of national policy films, followed how major directors acted within this framework, and examined the cultural underpinnings of cinema's assignment to the cause of the state. The latter aspect, in particular, has continued to fascinate Western authors, since wartime anthropologists and directors first turned to Japanese motion pictures in their efforts to shed light on the psyche of "the most alien enemy the United States had ever fought in an all-out struggle".⁴ A number of succeeding authors have elaborated and generalized the findings of wartime observers. According to them, national policy films differed from Western objects of comparison by particular features such as the portrayal of war as a natural disaster or the undeveloped notion of the enemy.⁵

After the turn of the twenty-first century, new developments have begun to change this field of research in terms of quantity and quality. The following sections examine the nature of these developments.

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- 3 Defining "national policy film/s" as "films that are produced under the supervision of the state for the diffusion of national policies" 国家の管理の下に、国策の普及に作られた映画, the Comprehensive Dictionary of the Japanese Language (*Nihon kokugo dai jiten*) explains the term "national policy", in turn, as "the policies of the state" 国家の政策, the "policies for the accomplishment of the state's objectives" 国家目的を遂行するための政策, or "the measures for the governing of a country" 治国の方策. Cf. *Nihon kokugo dai jiten*, vol. 8, Shôgaku Kan 1976 (1974): 15. The locus classicus for the term "national policy" (*kokusaku*) is found in the early Chinese literary tradition and specifically related to the fiscal management of the state. An English translation of the passage in the *Guanzi* ("[Book of] Master Guan" 管子, jap. *Kanshi*, about seventh to first century B.C.E.) reads: "... if there is a year of severe droughts or floods and the people lose their primary source of income, [the prince] builds palaces and pavilions, thereby providing employment for those households so poor that they have neither a dog in front nor a pig behind. Thus, his building of palaces and pavilions is not to gratify his pleasure, but to maintain equilibrium in the economic policies of the state (*kokusaku*).” Cf. *Guanzi. Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China. A Study and Translation* by W. Allyn Rickett, vol. 2, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 1998: 365.
 - 4 Cf. Ruth F. BENEDICT: *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword. Patterns of Japanese Culture*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1946: 1.
 - 5 For contributions to research on wartime Japanese cinema that focus on this aspect, see, for instance, ANDERSON and RICHIE 1982 and DOWER 1993.

Increasing Research Activity

In 1987, John W. Dower could still speak of a cinema that was “all but forgotten” when discussing the country’s wartime production.⁶ However, less than two decades later, as many as six publications dealing exclusively with the topic or devoting major parts to it, appeared in Japanese or English language within a single year. It may be accidental that contributions by FURUKAWA Takahisa 古川隆久,⁷ Peter B. HIGH,⁸ KATÔ Atsuko 加藤厚子,⁹ MAKINO Mamoru 牧野守,¹⁰ Mark NORNES,¹¹ and SUGIBAYASHI Takashi 杉林隆¹² were published during the year 2003 and it should probably not be interpreted as a trend for future quantitative development of studies on the subject. Never-

6 The article is reprinted in DOWER 1993.

7 *Senji ka no Nihon eiga. Hitobito wa kokusaku eiga o mita ka* 戦時下の日本映画。人々は国策映画を見たか (Wartime Japanese Film. Did People Watch National Policy Films?), Yoshikawa Kôbun Kan 2003. For reviews, see HASEGAWA Tomoko 長谷川倫子 (*Media shi kenkyû* 15, November 2003: 182–6) and YAMAGUCHI Takeshi 山口猛 (*Kinema junpô* 1382, June 2003: 142). See also HARADA Ken’ichi 原田健一: “Eiga wa, Nihon de ika ni shite fukyû shita ka. Makino Mamoru, Katô Atsuko, Furukawa Takahisa san shi no kenkyû o megutte” 映画は、日本でいかにして普及したか。牧野守、加藤厚子、古川隆久三氏の研究をめぐって (How Did Film Diffuse in Japan? On the Research of Makino Mamoru, Katô Atsuko, and Furukawa Takahisa), *Media shi kenkyû* 16 (April 2004): 147–62.

8 *The Imperial Screen. Japanese Film Culture in the Fifteen Years’ War, 1931–1945*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press 2003. This is the revised and enlarged translation of a Japanese publication that originally appeared in 1995. Cf. Idem: *Teikoku no ginmaku. Jûgo nen sensô to Nihon eiga* 帝国の銀幕。十五年戦争と日本映画 (The Imperial Screen. The Fifteen Years’ War and Japanese Film), Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppan Kai 1995. For reviews of the English volume, see David R. COSTELLO in *History. Reviews of New Books* (32.1, 2003: 32) and YOSHIMOTO Mitsuhiro in *Journal of Asian Studies* (63.1, February 2004: 192–93).

9 *Sôdôin taisei to eiga* 総動員体制と映画 (The System of General Mobilization and Film), Shin’yô Sha 2003. For a review, see the above-cited article by HARADA Ken’ichi.

10 *Nihon eiga ken’etsu shi* 日本映画検閲史 (The History of Japanese Film Censorship), Pandora 2003. For a review, see HARADA 2004.

11 *Japanese Documentary Film. The Meiji Era Through Hiroshima*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2003. This publication is based on a doctoral dissertation that was presented to the University of Southern California in 1995. A review of this volume has been published by Freda FREIBERG for the online journal *Senses of cinema*. Cf. issue no. 30 (January–March 2004) at http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/books/04/30/japanese_documentary_film.html.

12 *Shôwa senji ki no Nihon eiga. Kantoku to eizô hyôgen* 昭和戦時期の日本映画。監督と映像表現 (Japanese Film During the Shôwa War Period. Directors and Forms of Audiovisual Expression), Suwa (Nagano): Chôei Sha 2003.

theless, it demonstrates the significant interest that the topic has been able to attract during the past decade.¹³

This impression is confirmed, when source compilation projects that center upon or include wartime Japanese cinema are considered. As early as 1994, the republication of contemporary industry yearbooks by Nihon Tosho Sentâ under the editorship of IWAMOTO Kenji and MAKINO Mamoru has made important data available to a wider circle of researchers.¹⁴ Two more initiatives that have to be mentioned in this respect, were brought under way by publisher Yumani Shobô in 2002. Edited by MAKINO Mamoru, *Nihon eiga ron gensetsu taikai* 日本映画論言説大系 (“Compendium of Japanese Film Discourse”) presents a thirty-volume reprint of film-related monographs that were published in Japanese until 1945. One third of the series is devoted to the “Period of the Wartime Film Control System” (*Senji ka no eiga tôsei ki*). It includes an interesting selection of texts by contemporary institutions as well as individual authors¹⁵ and will certainly contribute to the preservation and international distribution of little known works of the time.¹⁶

Even more ambitious appears the second initiative. As first installment of the series “Sources on ‘Wartime’ Media” 資料・〈戦時下〉のメディア (*Shiryô ‘senji ka’ no media*), a complete reprint of the journals *Nippon eiga* (“Japanese Film”) from 1936 to 1945 in thirty-one volumes and *Eiga junpô* (“Ten-Daily Film Reports”) from 1941 to 1943 in twenty volumes, is in the process of being published. Both periodicals recorded the development of film policy in detail and provided venues for the societal discussion of the relationship between film and state.¹⁷ Therefore, convenient access to reprints of these

13 Evidence of a continuation of this interest is the publication of two more volumes on the topic during the first half of the year 2004. See IWAMOTO Kenji 岩本憲児 (ed.): *Eiga to nashonarizumu* 映画とナショナリズム (Film and Nationalism), 1931–1945, Shinwa Sha 2004 (Nihon eiga shi sôsho 1) and IDEM (ed.): *Eiga to “Dai Tôa kyôeiken”* 映画と「大東亜共栄圏」 (Film and the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere), Shinwa Sha 2004 (Nihon eiga shi sôsho 2).

14 *Eiga nenkan. Shôwa hen I* 映画年鑑. 昭和編 (Film Yearbooks. Showa Period [Part] I), 10 vols. & 1 extra vol., Nihon Tosho Sentâ 1994.

15 For a work by an official of the Cabinet Information Bureau, see FUWA Yûshun 不破祐俊: *Eiga hô kaisetsu* 映画法解説 (Explanations on the Film Law [of the Year 1939]), Dai Nippon Eiga Kyôkai 1941. For a work by a film critic cf. SAWAMURA Tsutomu 沢村勉: *Gendai eiga ron* 現代映画論 (On Contemporary Film), Tôkei Shobô 1941.

16 Notably, “The History of the Film Control System for Korea” 朝鮮映画統制史 (*Chôsen eiga tôsei shi*) by TAKASHIMA Kinji 高島金次 (Chôsen Eiga Bunka Kenkyûjo 1943).

17 As editor for this part of the project serves MAKINO Mamoru. The publication was initiated in June, 2002. For the future, four more installments are planned. They will turn to

journals in Japanese and international libraries will be welcomed by students of the subject.

At a more general level, both source compilation projects demonstrate how rich and productive the domestic film culture was, also during this period. They will certainly contribute to qualifying the view that Japanese film criticism's level is "abysmal" and therefore not worthy of consideration – an opinion that has been put forward by the standard Western reference work on the nation's cinema for decades.¹⁸ The interesting features and controversial nature of contemporary criticism may be reasons why in the Japanese case, as opposed to other national cinemas, more energy has been devoted to source compilation than to the production of secondary literature.¹⁹

*The Integration of Cinema into Historical Research Agendas
and the Turn Towards Historical Approaches in Film Studies*

As title and content of the introduced source-compilation projects suggest, the increasing publication activity on wartime Japanese cinema is fueled by a new interest among historical sciences in the development and functions of the cultural field that is formed by publishers, press, radio, film, and, for instance, public events. Apparently, the publication of "Culture and Fascism" (*Bunka to fashizumu*) in 1993, acted as a catalyst in this respect.²⁰ Influential furthermore, was a series of three volumes that turned to the study of so-called media-events in modern and contemporary Japanese history.²¹ As a matter of

contemporary posters and leaflets, newspapers, radio, and newsreels.

- 18 Cf. the statement in ANDERSON and RICHIE 1982 (423): "Ignorance and cinematic illiteracy reign supreme, further compounded by an addiction to critical jargon which is incomprehensible to the reader and leads to endless misunderstandings among the critics themselves." See also FREIBERG 2004 who refers to this "canard" in reviewing the above-mentioned work by NORNES (2003).
- 19 In this context, the activities of MAKINO Mamoru deserve prominent attention. For an homage to his life and source-centered approaches, see Aaron GEROW and Abe Mark NORNES (eds.): *In Praise of Film Studies. Essays in Honor of Makino Mamoru*, Victoria, B.C.: Trafford 2001.
- 20 AKAZAWA Shirô 赤沢史郎 et al. (eds.): *Bunka to fashizumu. Senji ki Nihon ni okeru bunka no kôbô* 文化とファシズム. 戦時期日本における文化の光芒 (Culture and Fascism. The Radiance of Culture in Wartime Japan), Nihon Keizai Hyôron Sha 1993.
- 21 TSUGANESAWA Toshihiro 津金沢聡広 (ed.): *Kindai Nihon no media ibento* 近代日本のメディア・イベント (Media Events in Modern Japan), Dôbun Kan Shuppan 1996; Idem and ARIYAMA Teruo 有山輝雄 (eds.): *Senji ki Nihon no media ibento* 戦時期のメディア・

fact, some authors of the recent monographs on wartime Japanese cinema explicitly refer to the former volume by AKAZAWA Shirô and his colleagues. Others have been contributing to the study group on media history around the Seijô University professor ARIYAMA Teruo where many of the contributions to the latter volumes originated.²²

The growing number of monographs and relevant source editions was not the only result of cinema's integration into historical research agendas. It was also accompanied by the development and application of new methodological approaches.

In general, a turn towards contextualizing the audiovisual legacy of wartime Japanese cinema, is prominent among recently published research. Many earlier publications, ranging from the classic observations by Ruth BENEDICT to the writings of SATÔ Tadao, focused on the "content" of film examples. These works were not described as operating in a perfect social vacuum, but their contexts were highly schematized and clearly shaped by conceptualizations of the era that emphasized governmental control. By comparison, recent publications explore the various contexts of production and reception. In all cases, authors have examined a wide range of textual sources and formed a more or less solid empirical base for their arguments.²³ Outstanding in this respect, is the voluminous contribution by MAKINO which combines source compilation and interpretation in relating the history of Japanese film censorship. No less impressive is KATÔ Hideko's thorough study of the governmental system that attempted to mobilize cinema for the war effort. It proceeds not only from published official documents, industry yearbooks, and periodicals, but also incorporates archival research and interviews with former officials.

With the turn to history, official as well as private actors in the contemporaneous film world take on a much clearer shape. Their intentions, strategies,

イベント (Media Events in Wartime Japan), Sekai Shisô Sha 1998; TSUGANESAWA Toshihiro (ed.): *Sengo Nihon no media ibento* 戦後日本のメディア・イベント (Media Events in Postwar Japan), Sekai Shisô Sha 2002.

22 ARIYAMA Teruo also acts as editor of *Media shi kenkyû*, the study group's periodical that has appeared since 1994. With the exception of Mark NORNES and SUGIBAYASHI Takashi, all of the above-mentioned authors have presented aspects of their work to this study group. FURUKAWA Takahisa, KATÔ Atsuko, and MAKINO Mamoru have also published in *Media shi kenkyû*. FURUKAWA Takahisa (2003: 11) refers to AKAZAWA et al. 2003 as a decisive influence. Peter B. HIGH (2003: xvii) contextualizes his work within an ongoing "reevaluation of the general cultural history of wartime Japan".

23 This trend corresponds to the general turn to historical approaches in film studies that has taken place since the 1990s. Cf. Andrew SPICER: "Film Studies and the Turn to History", *Journal of Contemporary History* 39.1 (2004): 147–55.

mutual impacts, successes and failures begin to replace a one-dimensional narrative of the medium's instrumentalization by anonymous authorities. More or less inadvertently, recent literature also uncovers the perspective of differing observers – governmental institutions and the film audiences – on cinema programs. As will be demonstrated, this led to the challenge of predominant assumptions regarding which share of wartime programs represented national policy films and how they were actually received by audiences.

Redefining the Term “National Policy Film”

Established scholarship has relied on a scheme that roughly distinguishes between “national policy films”, “entertainment films” (*goraku eiga*), and “art films” (*geijutsu eiga*), when classifying wartime programs. The actual classification of a production is based upon a more or less thorough examination of content or plot. If propagandistic elements seem to prevail, the label “national policy” is attributed. Otherwise, “entertainment” or “art” is assigned.

A frequently examined work is the 1940 Tōhō production “China Nights” (*Shina no yoru*, dir. by FUSHIMIZU Osamu 伏水修). Being the “most shameless and fascinating propaganda exercise of the war years” according to John W. DOWER,²⁴ this movie depicts the story of an idealistic Japanese merchant seaman (HASEGAWA Kazuo 長谷川一夫) who convinces a young Chinese woman (YAMAGUCHI Yoshiko 山口淑子, alias Li Hsiang-lan 李香蘭, jap: *Ri Kōran*) that his compatriots on the East Asian continent have benevolent intentions, and finally wins her love. A number of contributions have elaborated upon this persuasive representation of the Japanese government's expansionist policies in this allegedly official propaganda piece.²⁵ However, recent contributions to the discussion by historians²⁶ have pointed to the fact that officials in

24 DOWER 1993: 46.

25 Cf. for instance Freda FREIBERG: “China Nights (Japan, 1940). The Sustaining Romance of Japan at War”, in: John Whiteclay CHAMBERS and David CULBERT (eds.): *World War II, Film, and History*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996: 31–46.

26 I refer to the publications by FURUKAWA Takahisa (2003) and KATŌ Atsuko (2003) who are both historians by training. FURUKAWA, a graduate of Tokyo University's doctoral course and a professor in the Department of International Cultural Studies at Yokohama City University, does not mention experiences in the field of film studies, but draws on the knowledge that he has acquired during three projects on the history of wartime Japan. Two of them were already concerned with the issue of “state policy”. Cf. *Shōwa senchū ki no sōgō kokusaku kikan* 昭和戦中期の総合国策機関 (The National Policy Institutions

the Home Ministry and the Ministry of Education did not evaluate this film positively in light of “state policy”. On the contrary, producers of the contemporary box office hit were severely criticized for taking advantage of audience demand for love stories and other “shallow” entertainment that was “in conflict with the spirit of the film law’s implementation.”²⁷ Even at the scenario stage, the project had encountered difficulties with censorship officers. In the month following the release of the Tôhō-production in June 1940, fiction film censorship restrictions were tightened, an administrative measure that was publicly attributed to the box office success of *China Nights*.²⁸

During the War Period of the Shôwa Era), Yoshikawa Kôbun Kan 1992; *Senji gikai* 戦時議会 (The Wartime Parliament), Yoshikawa Kôbun Kan 2001. A further study that turns to three giant media events that had been planned (the World Exposition and the Olympics) and realized (the festivities for the “2,600th anniversary” of Imperial rule according to tradition) in Japan for the year 1940. See *Kigen – Banpaku – Orinpikku* 紀元・万博・オリンピック (The [2,600th Anniversary of the] Origin of [Imperial] Rule – the World Exposition – the Olympic Games), Chûô Kôron Sha 1998. FURUKAWA has also published a number of scholarly articles in journals such as *Shigaku zasshi*, *Nihon rekishi*, and *Media shi kenkyû*. Cf., for instance, “Kakushin kanryô no shisô to kôdô” 革新官僚の思想と行動 (The Thought and Actions of the Reform Bureaucrats), *Shigaku zasshi* 99.4 (April 1990): 457–94. Directly related to the topic under review are the following contributions: “Shôwa senji ki no Nihon shakai ni okeru eiga no yakuwari” 昭和戦時期の日本社会における映画の役割 (The Function of Cinema in Japanese Society during the War Period of the Shôwa Era), *Nihon rekishi* 642 (November 2001): 14–30; “Taiheiyô sensô ki no Nihon shakai ni okeru eiga no yakuwari” 太平洋戦争期の日本社会における映画の役割 (The Function of Cinema in Japanese Society during the Pacific War), *Yokohama Shiritu Daigaku Kiyô. Jinbun kagaku keiretsu* 9 (March 2002): 1–25.

KATÔ Atsuko is a graduate of Ochanomizu University’s doctoral course. She has published in a variety of historical journals. See for instance “Nitchû sensô ki ni okeru eiga tōsei. Eiga hô seitei o megutte” 日中戦争期における映画統制. 映画法制定をめぐって (Film Control During the Period of the Sino-Japanese War. On the Enactment of the Film Law), *Shigaku zasshi* 109 (June 2000): 1165–88; “Eiga hô shikô ikô ni okeru eiga tōsei. Eiga shin taisei o chûshin ni” 映画法施行以降における映画統制. 映画新体制を中心に (The Film Control System Since the Enforcement of the Film Law. Concerning the New Order for the Film [World]), *Media shi kenkyû* 10 (October 2000): 37–54.

- 27 「映画法実施の精神に逆行しつつある」 Cf. Q [aka. TSUMURA Hideo 津村秀夫]: “Shin eiga hyô. Shina no yoru” 新映画評. 支那の夜 (Review of New Films. China Nights), *Tôkyô Asahi shinbun*, June 9, 1940 (evening edition). Cf. FURUKAWA 2003: 128. Tsumura served as film expert for the referred to institutions.
- 28 Ibid.: 128. Cf. also KATÔ 2000: 51–2. The restriction was carried out by the censorship section in the Home Ministry’s Police and Security Bureau in connection with the “Seventh [Day] of the Seventh [Month] Prohibitions” of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fishery that – using the slogan “Luxury is the Enemy” (*Zeitaku wa teki*) – propagated the ban of many consumption goods and practices from everyday life. Production companies were subjected to stricter scenario censorship and asked to initiate “wholesome, national entertainment movies” (*kenzen na kokumin*



China Nights (DOWER 1993: 42)

Interestingly, FURUKAWA and KATÔ arrive at different conclusions on the basis of these observations. While KATÔ explicitly avoids employing the term *kokusaku eiga* in her publication,²⁹ FURUKAWA calls for a use that reflects positive evaluation by contemporary governmental actors. As public institutions did not systematically employ the term in evaluating cinema programs, the author seeks to identify alternative classifications that predicate the same fact. According to FURUKAWA, it is the “exemption from the Home Ministry censorship fees” (*Naimu Shô ken’etsu tesûryô menjo*) that constitutes a condition sufficient to warrant the label “national policy film”.³⁰ Such exemptions were based on an April 1937 decree of the ministry and were conferred on documentary as well as fictional films that “contributed to the elevation of

goraku eiga) that featured positive subject matters. The use of comedians was not to be prohibited but, if necessary, to be restricted. Explicitly prohibited were “all films on the petty bourgeoisie (*shô shimin eiga*), plays that exclusively portrayed individual happiness (*kojin no kôfuku*), productions that featured the life of the wealthy (*fugô no seikatsu*), scenes of women smoking or drinking in coffee shops, foreign-influenced words, and, for instance, frivolous behavior. Ibid.: 51.

29 Ibid.: 6–7.

30 FURUKAWA 2003: 6.

the idea of the national essence (*kokutai kannen*), the establishment of morality among the national population (*kokumin dōgi*), the correction of misunderstandings regarding our country's domestic and international situation (*naigai jōsei*), the propaganda (*senden*) for administrative matters pertaining to, among others, the military, industry, education, fire prevention, hygiene or the enhancement of the public good (*kōeki*) in other ways."³¹

FURUKAWA's argument may appear convincing, but it fails to discuss problematic aspects. In this context, it should be noted that exemptions from censorship fees were not granted in the name of the "state", but were an administrative measure by one institution, the Police and Security Bureau in the Home Ministry (Naimu Shō Keiho Kyoku). Although exemption decisions allegedly considered recommendations and production support of other institutions, it is too simplistic to understand them as official confirmation that a film served *national* policy. After all, the well-known conflicts and rivalries among ministries and other governmental institutions including the Home Ministry, the Ministry of Education, the Ministries of Army and Navy, and, for instance, the Cabinet Information Bureau (Naikaku Jōhō Kyoku) were also prominent in the area of film policy.

An example of such conflicts between differing agencies is, once more, *China Nights*. On the one hand, the Tōhō project met serious objections among the censors of the Police and Security Bureau. On the other hand, as FURUKAWA relates himself,³² it received generous production support during location shooting on the Chinese continent by another institution, that is, the Army Ministry. This fact may have been a result of coordination problems rather than actual conflicts. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that the exemption from censorship fees cannot serve as a simple solution to the question of which elements of cinema programs represented national policy films according to contemporary governmental evaluations.

The example of *China Nights* also demonstrates that motion pictures cannot automatically be classified as entertainment products, when they were received unfavorably by some public institutions. As mentioned above, the "dream-like romantic love" (*yume no yō na romanchikku renai*) that FURUKAWA identifies

31 「国体観念の昂揚、国民道義の確立、我国内外情勢に対する認識の是正、軍事、産業、教育、防災、衛生等各種行政の宣伝、その他公益を増進するに資する」
Cf. *Katsudō shashin firumu ken'etsu nenpō* 活動写真フィルム検閲年報 (Annual Report on Film Censorship), Naimu Shō Keiho Kyoku 1939 [reprint, Ryūkei Shosha 1984]: 2–3.

32 FURUKAWA 2003: 127.

as a central topic of the Tōhō production³³ was interwoven with a particular representation of the Japanese expansion on the Chinese continent that no spectator could miss. These privately initiated propagandistic elements were the reason why observers of the industry used the expression “quasi national policy film” (*jun kokusaku*), when referring to this and similar “continent films” (*tairiku eiga*).

In sum, these observations suggest that future historical examinations of national policy film should integrate the perspective of wartime governmental institutions on cinema programs. However, the success of such an approach will rely on closer and more systematic scrutiny of textual sources that shed light on individual projects.

Among recent publications, only the volume of SUGIBAYASHI Takashi attempts such a closer examination of selected works and contextual materials. While this general approach appears promising, SUGIBAYASHI's text does not acknowledge the state of research. As the previous discussion has shown, few authors would argue that all motion pictures were national policy films, because they were produced under the legal constraints of the film law. Nevertheless, SUGIBAYASHI identifies this statement as the general opinion and seeks to prove the opposite.³⁴ More interesting seems another tendency of recent literature, the effort to integrate the perspective of historical audiences in the discussion.

The Historical Reception of National Policy Films

The question of how historical audiences actually reacted to national policy films is a terra incognita that established scholarship on wartime cinema has rarely set out to explore. This is by no means a peculiarity of the Japanese case, but has characterized research across the national borders of interest for a long time. Several reasons can account for the situation. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the belief that the new medium offered the best means to manipulate the thought and behavior of mass audiences was widespread. Dicta left by leaders across the political spectrum have testified

³³ Ibid.: 230.

³⁴ SUGIBAYASHI 2003: 15. The author's argumentation is all the more problematic as two of the works he chose for closer scrutiny were released before the implementation of the film law.

to this conviction,³⁵ and examples of film propaganda such as Sergei EISENSTEIN's *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and Leni RIEFENSTAHL's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) have been celebrated countless times as masterpieces in this context. This was in tune with the development of film studies that focused upon "significant" works and their authors, while the agency of spectators in the process of media consumption was largely ignored.

Only with the "performative turn" in cultural sciences since the 1990s,³⁶ have the actual screening and reception of motion pictures begun to occupy a more prominent place in research agendas. In the case of propaganda film, the British scholar Nicholas REEVES investigated whether much studied works actually reached their intended audiences and whether they had the expected impact. His publication of the year 1999 reexamined the wartime English, German, Italian, and Russian cinemas, arguing that the prevailing assumptions required significant qualification.³⁷

The promise of this research direction depends on the availability of related sources. Even a cursory screening of the journals *Eiga junpô* and *Nippon eiga* suggests that documentation of audience responses in wartime Japan is not as scarce as has been suggested.³⁸ At least after the management of film distribution was taken over by the public corporation Eiga Haikyû Sha ("Film Distribution Company") in April 1942, attendance numbers and box office results of the weekly changing programs were recorded in great detail. Statis-

35 Well known is the enthusiasm of many Bolshevik leaders. Among them, Lev TROTSKY commented in 1923: "This weapon which cries out to be used, is the best instrument for propaganda, technical, educational and industrial propaganda, propaganda against alcohol, propaganda for sanitation, political propaganda, any kind of propaganda you please, a propaganda which is accessible to everyone, which is attractive, cuts into the memory and may be a possible source of revenue." Cf. "Vodka, the Church and the Cinema", *Pravda*, 12 July 1923. Quoted in Richard TAYLOR and Ian CHRISTIE (eds.): *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896–1939*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1988: 95.

36 Erika FISCHER-LICHTE: "Vom 'Text' zur 'Performance'. Der 'performative turn' in den Kulturwissenschaften", *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* 31.110 (2000): 65–9. As a pioneering work in the domain of cinema studies is considered: Miriam HANSEN: *Babel and Babylon. Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1991.

37 *The Power of Film Propaganda. Myth or Reality?* London: Cassell 1999. Other contributions have confirmed REEVES' findings. For the National Socialist case, see Gerhard STAHR: *Volksgemeinschaft vor der Leinwand. Der nationalsozialistische Film und sein Publikum*, Berlin: Theissen 2001.

38 Cf. NORNES 2003: 106 who holds that "reception of Japanese films is exceedingly difficult to research."

tical data are complemented by observations of officials and cinema managers. Occasionally, the experiences of individual spectators are reproduced – a source type that has to be handled with great care as mostly desirable responses were chosen for publication.

Among recent publications, it is FURUKAWA's volume that makes use of these materials most systematically. The provocative question that serves as title for his book – “Did People Watch National Policy Films?” (*Hitobito wa kokusaku eiga o mita ka*) – is clearly rhetorical. Using statistical evidence, the historian argues that high attendance numbers in the case of strongly propagandistic productions such as the “The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malaya” (*Hawaii Marê oki kaisen*, dir. by YAMAMOTO Kajirô 山本嘉次郎, Tôhō 1942) were based to a large degree on the efforts of public actors to mobilize audiences in free or inexpensive exhibition meetings.³⁹

By comparison, the data on regularly paid cinema visits – according to FURUKAWA, the conscious decision of spectators to watch certain films – seem to point to the fact that the population generally preferred to watch *China Nights* and other entertaining motion pictures. Quoting a journal contribution of the year 1940 by the manager of the Japanese subsidiary of Paramount Pictures, the author even suggests that this preference can be perceived as “silent protest against the system of film control” (*eiga tôsei e no mugon no kôgi*).⁴⁰

As interesting as this interpretation may be, it is based on a selective reading of available quantitative and qualitative materials on the one hand, and a simplistic equation of historical audiences with the “common people” (*shomin*), on the other hand. In the subchapter “Indeed unpopular national policy films” (*Yappari funinki na kokusaku eiga*), for example, FURUKAWA turns to the developments of 1941 and states that the box office results of the Tôhō production “Horses” (*Uma*) were poor apart from the release exhibition in Tokyo. The information rests upon a short remark by a representative of the “Japan Theater” (Nippon Gekijô) which indeed confirms the positive results of *Horses* in the capital and the greater Kantô area as well as the moderate takings in Western Japan. However, the passage does not provide reasons for the particular reception pattern. For explanations of the production's

39 FURUKAWA 2003: 179–81. In doing so, FURUKAWA unwillingly proves the success of governmental policies undertaken to mobilize audiences in Japan. International comparison suggests that such successes were not a matter of course. Cf. REEVES 1999.

40 Ibid.: 131–32.

box office results additional sources would have to be analyzed. Such sources do exist, and, interestingly, they offer a variety of reasons. The manager of a Kyoto cinema, for example, raised the issue of marketing. According to him, Tôhō's advertising campaign in the Kansai area had exclusively focused on the artistic quality of the film. Among other things, the simple title *Horses* had led potential customers to mistake the fictional feature film for a lengthy, educational documentary. His commentary also points to another aspect of cinema business that must be accounted for when examining box office results. The management of production companies rarely targeted the general population when developing a project. Instead, it attempted to cater to the tastes of differing audience segments. In the case of *Horses*, explained the cinema manager, the main target audience was clearly the cineastic milieu of students. As the release of the film unfortunately coincided with the exam period of students in Western Japan, the box office results were much lower than expected.⁴¹

The example of *Horses* demonstrates that interpretation of audience reactions requires a more careful analysis of available sources. In order to arrive at convincing results, it should be based on more sophisticated concepts of historical cinema audiences. Such concepts not only have to differentiate between various audience segments, they also have to historicize the varying significance of particular segments for box office results over the course of the wartime years.

As the above observations on new developments in research on wartime Japanese cinema illustrate, FURUKAWA, KATÔ, and the other authors have taken up general trends in the historical examination of cinema to provide new perspectives on the subject. In certain respects, their achievements establish a new basis for scholarship. In other areas, they remain oriented along limitations of previous publications. The concluding section turns to some of the limitations that will have to be overcome, in order to reach a new stage of scholarship.

Future Directions

One of the limitations that inform previous and recent publications, is the focus on film projects whose resulting audiovisual material is preserved and

41 ODA Nobuyasu 小田進康: “‘Uma’ no ippon date kôgyô” 「馬」の一本立て興行 (On the Exhibition of Horses Without [Additional Attraction], *Eiga junpô*, April 1, 1941: 153.

easily accessible. The most prominent attention has been received by those works that have been released on video during the past decades. As only the Shôchiku and the Tôhō studios were active as producers during both the entire wartime and postwar periods, their products naturally prevail among this group. In the context of research that concerns the nature of the film material itself, this may be necessary, but in many other cases it is not. HIGH's voluminous *The Imperial Screen* demonstrates that the lack of audiovisual material can be overcome to a certain extent by the use of textual sources. In a number of cases such as the 1942 Daiei production "The Day England Fell" (*Eikoku kuzururu no hi*, dir. by TANAKA Shigeo 田中重雄), the author uses scenarios and coverage in contemporary periodicals to reconstruct the content of lost films. Unfortunately, this approach also remains the exception in a work that, according to HIGH's introduction, represents "the most thoroughgoing survey yet published of Japanese *kokusaku* or 'national policy' films".⁴² Many other productions whose negative and positive copies are entirely or almost completely lost, but were important in the context of governmental use of the medium are not even mentioned in the index of this book.⁴³ Surprisingly, this observation also applies to studies that are based on analysis of textual sources such as FURUKAWA's volume on the question of whether the Japanese population actually watched national policy films. The above-quoted *The Day England Fell* as well as many other lost works are not examined. Therefore, it can be concluded that our knowledge of these aspects of wartime Japanese cinema is significantly distorted by the more or less accidental availability of films. One step towards qualitatively new scholarship would be to create awareness of this limitation and to find ways to overcome it.

Availability is not the only factor that distorts the present perception of cinema programs during the wartime period. Another limitation is the focus on Japanese productions, although foreign motion pictures occupied an important position in the country's cinema business until the early 1940s.

The extension of the research field that takes shape, when such aspects are accounted for, suggests that future research activities should not attempt to

42 HIGH 2003: XIII.

43 One example is the 1941 Nikkatsu production "A Loving Family" (*Ai no ikka*) which was not only recommended by the Ministry of Education at the time of its release, but also received an award by the same institution at a later point. The German background and history of this production are introduced in: Harald SALOMON: "Agnes Sapper's Wirkung in Japan. Zur Rezeption eines deutschen Familienbilds in der frühen Shôwa-Zeit", *Japonica Humboldtiana* 7 (2003): 179–237.

present yet another survey or reinterpretation of wartime Japanese cinema as such. Much evidence points to the fact that a number of middle-range studies is required. Such studies could examine clearly defined and systematically chosen bodies of sources. They could also combine the new approaches developed by recent literature with the thematic foci of earlier research introduced in the beginning of this review article. Among other questions, it would be particularly interesting to reexamine the cultural characteristics of national policy films in light of governmental evaluation and audience reception.